

place services

Ref: Urban Design assessment of development opportunity sites
Title: Emson Close/Rose & Crown Walk, Saffron Walden, Essex
Client: Uttlesford District Council
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Executive Summary

Following consultation on the proposals for a draft Local Plan in June/July 2012 Emson Close and Rose and Crown Walk, plus associated back lands, was identified as having development opportunities. Through a process of viability testing, context analysis and urban design appraisal, the future development potential of the site has been explored and development principles established.

This document sets out the principles for the future development of the site, ensuring that any development fits into the surrounding context, whilst providing the town with a suitable mix of uses which meets its needs and requirements for the future growth.

The following summary sets out the key issues and principles future development proposals will need to address:

- There is potential for significant new mixed use development contributing to more viable retail circuits, more sociable streets and a more attractive environment, though a co-ordinated approach is necessary to maximise the opportunity considering different land holdings
- Addressing existing and future parking need is a key priority for improving the pedestrian environment and unlocking development potential
- There may be potential to tier car parking to facilitate intensification, though this would need to be carefully considered, especially given the historic context
- The main back land area has potential for a large anchor unit/s which would help draw custom into this part of the town centre
- A new link between Rose and Crown Walk and Emson Close might be provided to improve access and promote cross-custom and circulation
- There is scope for enhancing the interface between The Common and the town centre, through sensitively designed development, gateway landmarks, landscaping and by making more use of the listed gazebo
- Servicing options need to be considered balancing individual commercial needs with wider community objectives
- Development should seek to retain and enhance/complement the existing positive characteristics of the area including its historic building vernacular, close-knit form, permeable network of streets and its retail and service diversity

Purpose of this report

Uttlesford District Council is assessing the viability of a number of development opportunity sites in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet. This report follows on from another commissioned report undertaken by Carter Jonas titled; 'Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites' November 2012. The Carter Jonas report sets out the future viability of development options for each of the identified sites. This report takes the findings of the Carter Jonas document and begins to establish urban design development principles and options for each site including future uses.

1. Local Context

Saffron Walden is an attractive market town with an interesting variety of small traders and is probably under represented in terms of national retailers as compared to comparable towns. To some this is part of its attractiveness. There is generally a fairly low level of vacant retail units and when a unit becomes available it is usually taken up fairly quickly. There is perhaps a shortage of larger units which might attract more national retailers to the town.

The town is close to Stansted airport and has excellent links to Cambridge, just 15 miles away. The prime area for retailers is King Street and while rental levels for retail units have reduced since their peak they are still high enough to justify development in appropriate locations.

Emson Close and Rose and Crown Walk developments, public realm and associated backlands at the eastern end of the town centre has been identified in the draft allocations policy.



2. Policy and Viability Context

Emerging Site Allocation Policies (LDF Working Group Oct 2012)

Saffron Walden Policy - Development Opportunity Sites

The Council will support development and redevelopment opportunities for town centre uses in the following town centre locations.

- The Fire Station/ Saffron Walden Laundry
- Emson Close/ Rose and Crown Walk and car parks to rear of Boots and Saffron Building Society

Development should form part of a comprehensive development or not prevent the development of any other part of the site. Development will need to be implemented in accordance with design guidance approved by the Council and other Development Management policies. Implementation of the proposals will be regulated by legal obligation in association with the grant of planning permissions.

Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites report (Carter Jonas Nov 2012)

The Council granted consent in July 2011 for 9 flats and three retail units in Emson Close providing a further 555 m² of retail space through an additional floor to the existing offices and a new building on the car park. This was the renewal of a previous consent won on appeal in 2008 but never implemented. The residential element of such a scheme would be expected to improve viability of the scheme to some extent so the fact that the planning consent has not been implemented does imply that development in this relatively off centre site is problematic.

In order for any retail development to succeed a scheme needs to be in a suitable established location or large enough to create adequate pedestrian flows. For Emson Close and Rose & Crown Walk this might be possible if pedestrian links can be created with attractive public spaces and retail units on both sides from the Market Place/Emson Close entrance through to Rose & Crown Walk. Ideally this should include new retail units on the car park areas and if a third link to Market Street was achievable this should substantially improve pedestrian flows and the viability of any scheme. A scheme of this nature would make a significant contribution to the floor space requirements of the town and provide a suitable range of retail units to attract new retailers and create a viable development. Some residential units on the upper floors might be included to help the viability if an appropriate environment can be achieved for them.

Different ownerships and Listed Building/Conservation issues are likely to be a consideration in bringing such a scheme together. Retaining some private car parking may be necessary to gain the co-operation of some owners/tenants with Market Street and Market Place premises and any loss of public car parking will also be an issue for the public using Saffron Walden.

Summary

- Any retail needs to be in a suitable established location
- Retail elements need to have sufficient footprint to create adequate pedestrian flows
- Create new attractive pedestrian links and spaces
- Retail units on either side of Crown Walk
- New retail on the car park areas
- A third link to Market Street would increase viability
- A suitably sized development would attract new retailers to the town
- Residential units on upper floors will aid viability
- Land ownership issues
- Listed Buildings/conservation issues
- Retain some private car parking
- Loss of public parking maybe an issue

3. Historical Context

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals

The site lies within the Saffron Walden Conservation Area. It does not contain any listed buildings, though 13 are identified as of relevance given they adjoin or overlook, albeit predominantly from their rear aspect. These are on Church Street, Common Hill, Emson Place, Hill Street and Market Street/Place. Of these the Saffron Walden Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy highlights the following:

- Barclays Bank, Market Place – a Grade II* 19th century red brick building with stone dressings and gothic detailing. The only other Grade II* property is The Priory, a 16th century property on Common Hill.
- 33 Grange and Garden Wall to Church Street – a Grade II listed property from the 19th Century with the wall in urgent need of repairs and suggested for the Buildings at Risk Register.

The conservation area appraisal also identifies:

- The important architectural/historic value of sections of wall, some up to 3m of red brick or flint, helping enclose car parks on Emson Street and Rose and Crown Walk. These would be protected from demolition without prior consent unless otherwise stated. Market Place and surrounding buildings are also highlighted for their group value.
- The large “unkempt site” to the rear of the Grange on Church Street which is considered out of character and in need of environmental improvements.
- Important trees on Emson Street and in the car park here, with more related to the junction with Common Hill. However, none are afforded full TPO protection.

Archaeology report

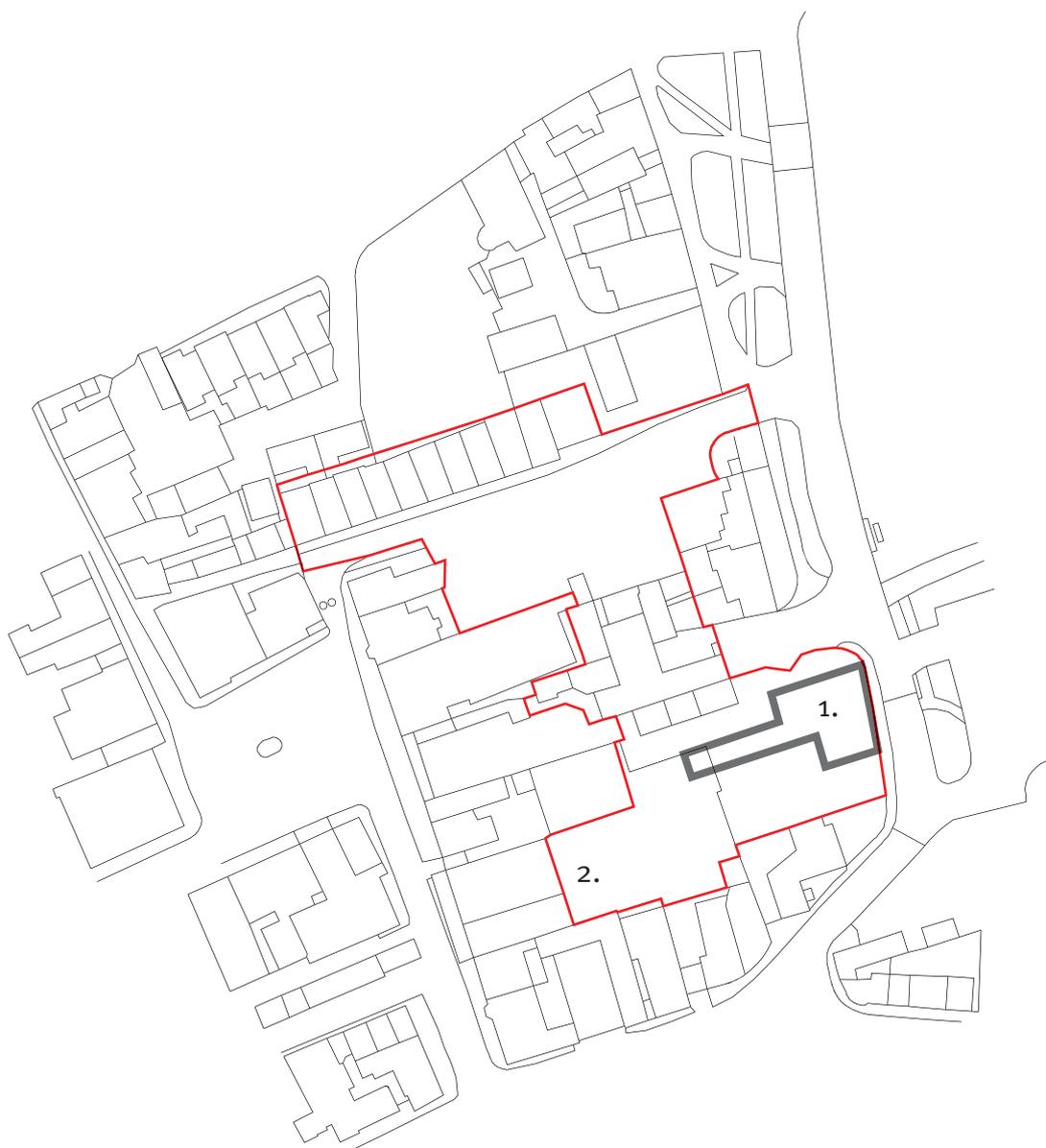
The study area lies within the medieval town area of Saffron Walden. There is known to have been prehistoric, Roman and Saxon occupation on the ridge top before the construction of the town. After the Norman Conquest Saffron Walden was granted to the de Mandevilles, becoming the centre of their Essex and Suffolk estates. They built a castle on the chalk peninsula between the two streams of the Slade (King’s Ditch and Madgate Slade). The castle was built to dominate the area and its plan determined the subsequent street layout. The inner bailey was oval in plan and contained the domestic and defensive buildings of the de Mandevilles, of which only the flint rubble keep survives. The outer bailey was also ovoid in plan, fully enclosing the inner bailey and the original town. The church was built and two streets, Church Street and Castle Street, laid out within the outer bailey. In 1141 the de Mandevilles acquired the right to hold a market. By the 13th century the town had passed from the de Mandevilles to the de Bohuns. In the early to mid 13th century a large town enclosure was laid out to the south and west of the outer bailey and the outer bailey ditch back-filled. The town enclosure ditches, known as the Battle or Repell Ditches enclosed a total area of 20 hectares. Within this were laid out new streets, principally High Street and its back lane Gold Street, and a new market-place.

Only the market area and the High Street were actually built-up by the end of the 14th century, the remainder being under agricultural use. In the late medieval period Saffron Walden became the major English centre for the production of the saffron crocus which was used to produce dye (hence the town’s name). It also played an important role in the East Anglian wool industry, with the keeping of sheep and manufacture of cloth. The magnificent parish church reflects the prosperity in the town in this period. The town did not expand beyond its medieval limits until the late 18th/early 19th century.

The study area is located between the eastern side of the mid-13th century market-place and the town defensive ditch, in an area that has been built-up since the mid-13th century.

Excavation to the rear of the Rose and Crown revealed the line of the town defensive ditch (1), which averaged about 2.5m deep by 3.5m wide. The archaeological deposits were located at a depth of 0.35m below the present ground surface. To the west of this a monitoring exercise behind the former Bell Inn (approx. location 2) revealed three thin superimposed layers, possibly associated with a late medieval or post-medieval timber structure.

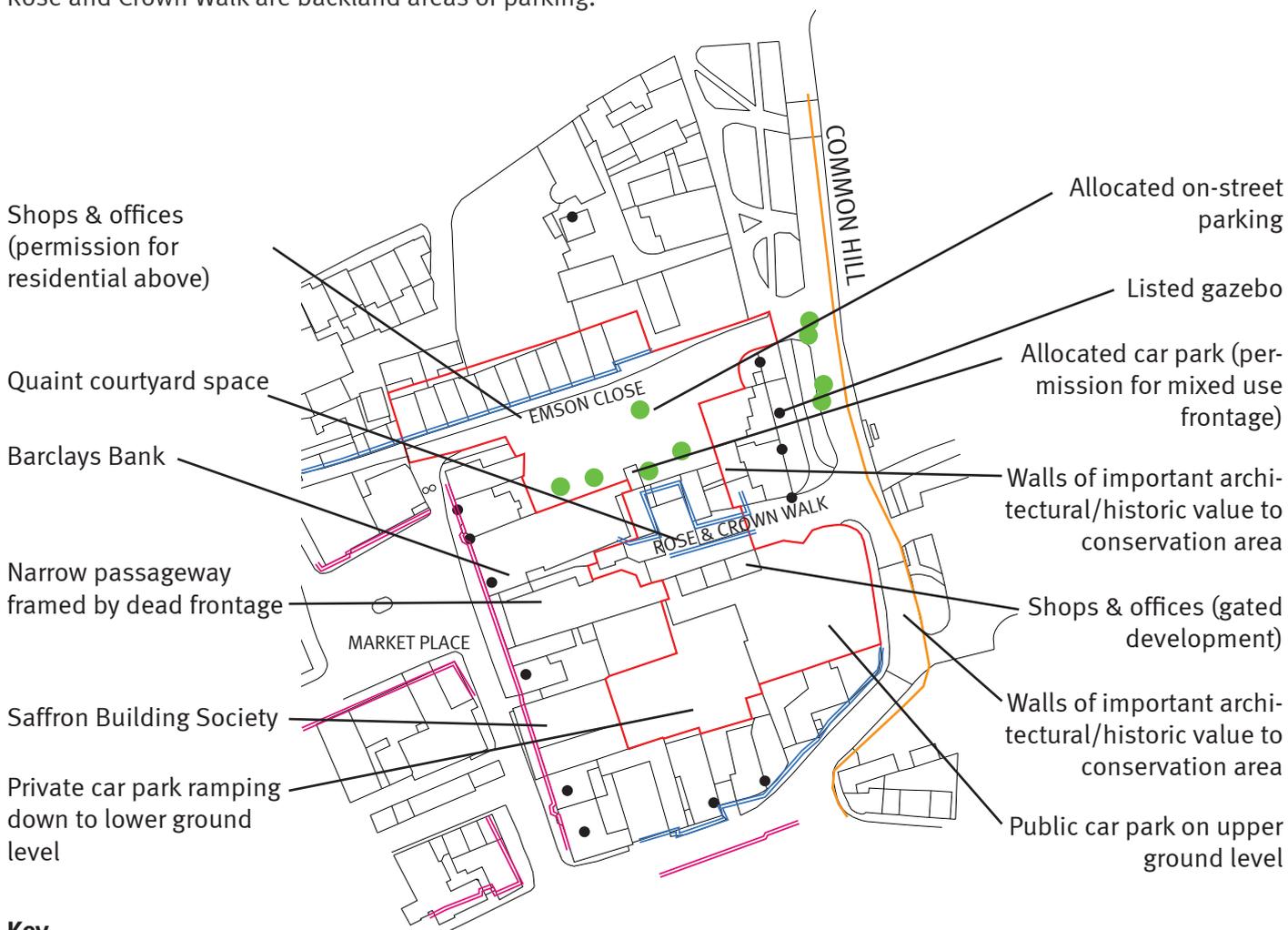
The archaeological requirements if development proceeds will comprise an initial phase of trial trenching followed by open area excavation of significant deposits identified. The trenches will be positioned to identify depth of the archaeological deposits across the area so that preservation in situ can be achieved where possible.



4. Site Analysis

The plan below highlights the principle site and site context issues, including opportunities and constraints for future use. The site, encompasses two links and associated property connecting The Common with the heart of Saffron Walden centred on Market Place. The area is perceived as relatively peripheral within the town centre, with only secondary retail frontage, incomplete retail circuits/strips, no anchor presence and lack of development to the east arising from The Common.

Emson Close is a secondary shopping street, which suffers from a relatively poor physical environment unsympathetic to its conservation area setting being dominated by postwar architecture, allocated car parking and backs of properties. Rose and Crown Walk is an intimate and generally attractive development, though lacks community presence out of hours, is largely gated and at either end suffers from missing retail frontage. Behind Rose and Crown Walk are backland areas of parking.



Key

- Site boundary
- Primary street frontage
- Secondary street frontage
- Conservation area boundary
- Listed buildings
- Building that makes important architectural/historic contribution to the conservation area
- TPOs / important trees

Photographic survey with annotation



Emson Close viewed from Common Hill. The street slopes gently down towards Market Place with postwar mixed use development on the right in front of which is allocated on-street parking. An allocated car park is on the left framed by the exposed backs of properties and sections of boundary walling. The gap in development frontage here reduces the streets visual definition and activity. The pine tree in the foreground is one of a number of important specimens in the area.



The meandering Rose and Crown Walk viewed from the gated entry point nearest Common Hill. This private development sensitively blends new and old within a attractive close-knit retail led environment. Unfortunately, the development also currently appears relatively detached, inward looking and is gated out of hours.



The courtyard space off Rose and Crown Walk provides a pleasant and intimate space which although small provides welcome relief, a focal point to the route and is complemented by 'spill-out' activity. There might be an opportunity to continue the link through to Emson Close as part of wider retail circuit, though this would need to be sensitively considered.



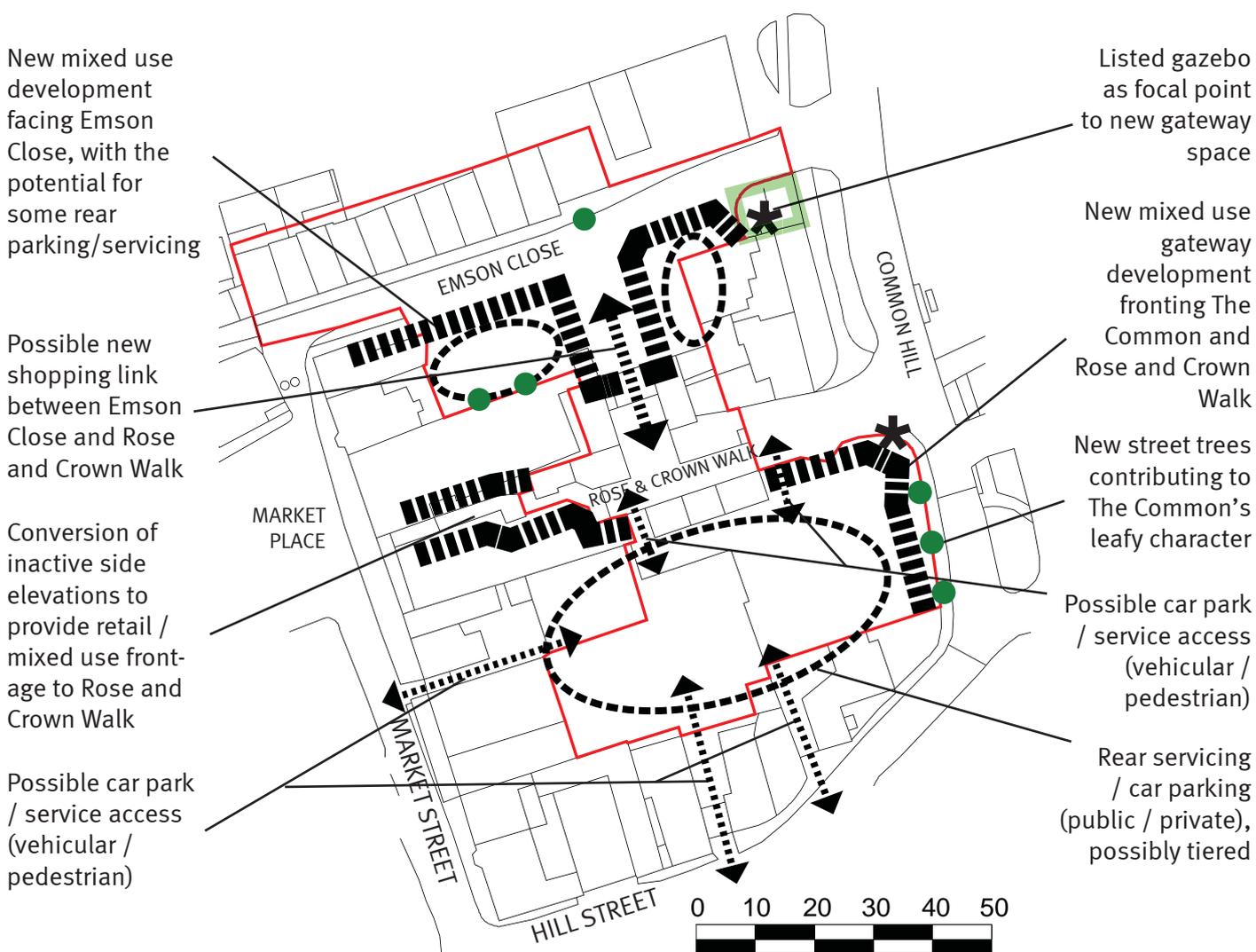
The private car park to the rear of Market Place, viewed from the upper ground floor public car park adjoining Common Hill. These car parks might have redevelopment potential, though this would need to address a range of issues including level changes and possible sensitivities arising from adjoining development.

Key Principles

The development principles plan below highlights the key criteria for the future development of the site to follow. This plan represents the main development opportunities of the site while indicating the constraints of the site and the neighbouring properties.

Development principles:

- New mixed use frontage, including new build and conversion of dead frontage, to fill in gaps in retail circuits/ strips and with sufficient residential above to provide self policing and community interest
- Car parking and servicing positioned discreetly to the rear and with appropriate access
- Consider sensitively designed tiered parking in the main backland area to support and maximise complementary development, increase town centre parking and exploiting level change opportunities
- Explore the potential for a new sympathetically designed link between Emson Close and Rose and Crown Walk, contributing to a better integrated retail area offer
- Introduce a range of retail and service units, including anchor store/s with appropriate parking
- Improve the gateway to Emson Close through refurbishment/conversion of the listed Gazebo within a new open space well relating to new development and The Common
- Exemplary frontage and landscape treatment to Common Hill, with the potential for appropriately scaled and designed landmark development promoting this important gateway point



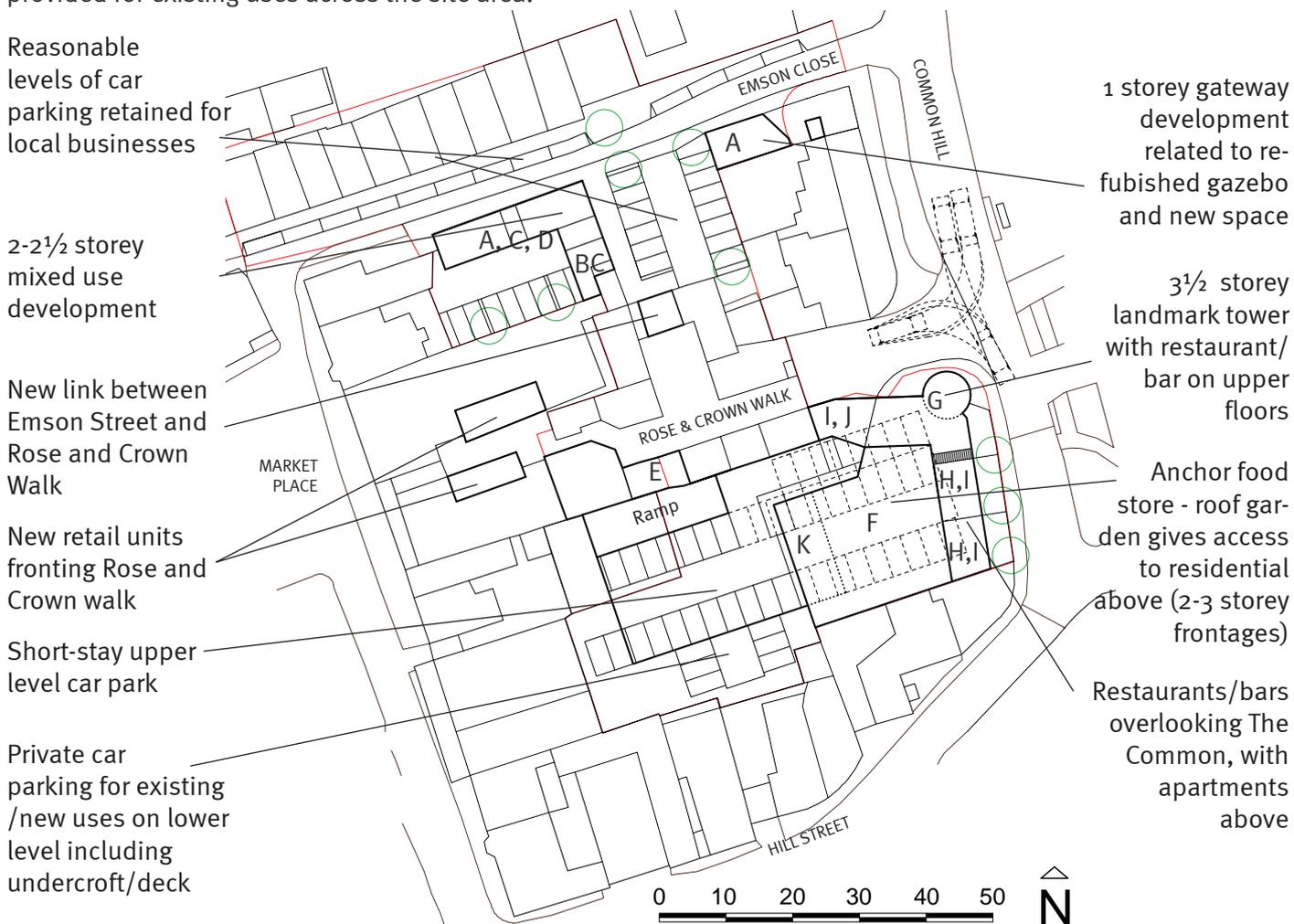
Indicative Outline Proposal

The site could accommodate a mix of retail and residential use, including a large anchor unit such as a small/medium sized food store. Sensitive high quality design would help achieve a compact, relatively dense form of development, complementing the historic townscape, increasing the retail/residential offer and maximising value.

Development breakdown

location	units	type	car parking	garden/terrace
Emson Close (A)	3	retail unit (60sqm)	1 per unit courtyard/car park	na
Emson Close (B)	1	retail unit (30sqm)	1 per unit car park	na
Emson Close (C)	3	1bed apartment (45sqm)	100% courtyard	na
Emson Close (D)	2	2bed apartment (65sqm)	100% courtyard	na
Rose & Crown (E)	1	retail extension (20sqm)	na	na
Common Hill (F)	1	food store (600sqm)	short-stay car park	na
Common Hill (G)	1	A3/4 retail unit (200sqm)	short-stay car park	roof terrace
Common Hill (H)	2	A3/4 retail unit (50sqm)	short stay car park	spill out space
Common Hill (I)	5	2bed apartment (65sqm)	200% undercroft	terrace/balcony
Common Hill (J)	1	1bed apartment (45sqm)	100% undercroft	terrace/balcony
Common Hill (K)	3	2bed duplex (75sqm)	200% undercroft	terrace/balcony

Additional new retail units are created by converting the rears/sides of existing retail units and one retail unit is lost to create a link between Emson Street and Rose and Crown Walk. 56 private car parking spaces are provided for existing uses across the site area.



Consultation

As part of the preparation of this report the following groups were consulted on in regard to the future development of the site;

- Strategic Development Management, Essex County Council Highways
- Conservation Officer, Uttlesford District Council
- Tree Officer, Uttlesford District Council
- District, town and parish councillors
- Historic Environment Specialist, Place Services

Relevant district, town and parish councillors were invited to a 'walk and talk' meeting on site to walk around the site and discuss key issues including setting out their aims objectives for the site. The 'walk and talk' day was held on Tuesday 11th December 2012. A summary of the comments are included below as well as any additional thoughts the councillors provided.

Strategic development highways comments

- Parking survey needed to assess the current and future needs
- Parking- urban standards could be applied
- Review of parking at Swan Meadow and Common

Walk and Talk summary

- Lots of potential opportunities for development on the Rose and Crown car park
- Decked level car park would provide parking and delivery space while sustaining surrounding uses
- First floor access to the rear of the units fronting Market Square would create improved pedestrian links
- Development on the car park could create a new destination while incorporating a residential element
- A parking strategy needs to be explored to review the needs and demands for town centre spaces
- Rose and Crown walk needs to be improved as a key pedestrian link to the common
- Emson Close has great potential but needs to link into the wider pedestrian circuit
- Links to Rose and Crown would be useful but levels may dictate the feasibility
- Vehicle access to the Market Square is a definite no
- Parking expansion on the Common is a definite no

Councillor's invited to contribute:

Simon Lloyd Town Clerk, Cllr Watson, Cllr Perry, Cllr Walters, Cllr Eastham, Cllr Asker, Cllr Sadler, Cllr Rolfe, Cllr Eden, Cllr Ketteridge

Town councillors

Ben Balliger, Beryl Wardley, Cliff Treadwell, David Britton, Mike Hibbs, Milon Ahmed, Nick Osborne, Richard Harrington, Sandra Eden, Sarfraz Anjum

Contacts

This document has been prepared on the request of Uttlesford District Council and has been produced by Place Services, a trading company of Essex County Council.

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Reference Documents

Uttlesford District Council Local Plan (2005)
Uttlesford District Council
2005

Parking Standards: Design and good practice
Essex County Council
2009

Assessment of Development Opportunity Sites
Carter Jonas
November 2012